

# **A Summary on the Epistle to the Hebrews**

By  
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I can truly say that my understanding of the salvation I received from Christ has been made abundantly clearer thanks to this letter. I would love to thank the author for the growth I gained in studying this letter. However the identity of the author is unknown, but there is no lack of ideas as to who wrote it. The list goes on and on as to who the author was. The opinions run the gamut from Paul to Barnabas, (whom I personally go back and forth in awarding my vote to) some scholars even suggest that either Priscilla or Mary the mother of Jesus was the author. I have my reasons why I do not think the author was a woman, however even if we knew who wrote this, the most excellent of all epistles, it would not add one iota of importance to its contents. That being said, I shall not get into the many minutia of who the author is, except to say the letter is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit and that is really all that matters.

It's been said that, "*It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks.*" This saying describes most people who get set in their ways. The Lord designed man to be a creature of habit, and like all other men I also am a creature of habit. Thus I learned to do things in a certain way and I find it very difficult to change my ways. When someone tells me of a better and more efficient way of doing what I am already accustomed of doing, I am by nature skeptical. Even after they have proved to me their way works better, I find it hard to change from the way I used to do it. In time, I will start doing things the way I was shown that works better. However, in the back of my mind I will always have a longing to do it the old way.

What really makes me change permanently and forever is when the new way comes with a realization that my life is better and more complete by doing it the new way. The author of this Epistle wrote to such people who were taught a new way by their parents who received salvation and forgiveness years ago when the only persecution was from other Jews. Now the persecution started coming from the Roman authorities. Unfortunately at the first sign of trouble these Christians decided to go back to the safe and more comfortable way of doing what their ancestors had grown accustomed to doing for over 1400 years.

We know that the letter was written for the church members at large including, probably, the home churches because of the closing remarks.

*(Hebrews 13:17 NASB)*

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*

*(Hebrews 13:24 NASB)*

*Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.*

To convince these readers of their folly in returning to the old ways of doing things, the writer uses various arguments to show them why they are better off in Christ.

By pointing out the superiority of the New Covenant in Christ over the Old Covenant, the writer systematically laid a foundation for the reader to build upon with confidence they will be better off. First, there were the prophets, God's ancient spokesmen; then the angels, Israel's guardians; Israel's great leader, Moses; followed by the godly general, Joshua; then we have Aaron and the priesthood. Along with all these Christ is also better than the animal sacrifices, and the eternal sanctuary in heaven is superior to the temporary one on earth. Each was a popular champion from Israel's past and like challengers in heavy weight boxing tournament they stood in the way of the inevitable champion.

All these former heroes needed to be heard from, but each was woefully inadequate if followed instead of Christ. It was clearly a case of the good being the enemy of the best. Eclipsing all these, as the rising sun eclipses the light of the stars, is the figure of Jesus, God's Son, the Creator and heir of all things. Thus the author uses many ways to show how their lives will be better and more complete by following a more efficiently sufficient way. In a series of commentaries on the Bible by Ray C. Stedman titled "A Panorama of the Scriptures", Mr. Stedman likens the book of Hebrews to a boxing tournament. While his comment is more of a simple comparison I will attempt to use his analogy in my attempt to make my paper a little more interesting.

First, we have the comparison to the prophets who were sent by God to proclaim a message. Prophets were the immediate organs of God for the communication of his mind to

men on what He wanted them to know. Throughout the Old Testament, there are prophets from Moses to David and Jeremiah to Malachi who told of the coming messiah. However, Christ is greater than these prophets were because He is the message that they proclaimed. As an exact image of God, Christ reflects the will of the Father. He is also the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. Not just a messenger or a creation, Christ is the Creator Himself. Knockout, bring on the next challenger.

Of all the creations of God, humans and angels are the only interpersonal intelligent beings. Angels are spiritual beings created by God who help carry out his work on earth. They bring God's messages to people protecting them and offering encouragement and guidance. At times they have carried out God's punishments and blessings, patrolling the earth and fighting the forces of evil. There are both good and bad angels but because bad angels are allied with the devil, or Satan, they have considerably less power and authority than good angels do.

Many Jews had a superstitious or idolatrous respect for angels, because they had received the law and other tidings of the Divine will by their ministry. They looked upon them as mediators between God and men, and some went so far as to pay them a kind of religious homage or worship. Thus it was necessary that the author should insist, not only on Christ being the Creator of all things including angels, but also the risen and exalted Messiah in human nature, to whom angels, authorities, and powers are made subject. But Angels are created heavenly beings that worship Him and do His will and so we have a TKO. This challenger failed to answer the bell.

Now, we have the man whom the Jews look to as the greatest prophet and leader God ever breathed life into. Moses went toe to toe with the most powerful ruler of the known world and forced him to let God's people go. He brought them out of bondage in Egypt for breakfast and parted the Red Sea by lunch. For an encore, He gave them the greatest document ever produced in the history of the world. Moses even stood before God and repented for the Israelite's sins, thus he saved them from total destruction.

(Exodus 32:30 NASB)

*On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin;*

*and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."*

If it were not for Moses' faithful adherence to God's commands, they very well could have deified him like the Greeks did with their famous athletes. Moses is truly a worthy opponent. Yet, he falls way short of being able to stand up to the qualities of God incarnate. In fact Moses himself looked forward to Christ and rejoiced.

*(Deuteronomy 18:15 NASB)*

*"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me  
from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.*

*(Deuteronomy 18:18-19 NASB)*

1. (18) *'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will  
put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.  
(19) 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall  
speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.*

This is a case where the challenger himself threw in the towel out of respect for a far more superior opponent saying, "NO MAS, NO MAS".

Next, we have Joshua, the great General, who followed Gods orders without question. When one thinks of Joshua the word courage comes to mind. His courage was a direct result of his faith in God. After all Joshua saw all God did for Israel from Egypt on through his conquests of Canaan. Joshua obeyed God's call unhesitatingly and to the end, but it was because he trusted wholly in the promise of the eternal rest he would someday have in Christ. Along with his expert military mind he had a quality seldom seen in the same kind of man. He was able to combined justice as a magistrate with the gentleness as a mere man.

Along with the spirit of a ruler he had the temper and discretion to deal with the arrogant and sometimes troublesome Israelites. With diligence and equity he portioned out the fruits of victory with complete unselfishness. Above all was his humility as a mere man among God's people. He gave God, who freed him from bondage in Egypt, credit for all his victories from his first at Jericho to his last. In his last public address he exhorted the people

to keep faith in the God who delivered them, but he did not go on and on about his exploits or personal achievements.

The big weapon this General brings to the fight is the rest Israel experienced after he brought them into the land of Canaan. By the time Joshua retired to a quiet retirement, there was an experience of rest for Israel in Canaan. A rest from armed invasion, natural disasters, and a failure of crops and as long as they were faithful to God they were blessed with a rest from these dangers. At best though, that rest was outward and essentially physical. It could not satisfy the promise of rest to the human race, which was intended from the beginning. Jesus is not specifically compared here with Joshua but the rest that he gave them. However, in terms of relative greatness, it is apparent from the author's comments that the work of Joshua in leading Israel into the rest symbolized by the Promised Land was far inferior to the work of Jesus. So although he would seem to be a worthy opponent, this challenger is not up to the challenge because Joshua himself looked forward to a better rest.

Men have always searched for that perfect geo-political idea known as Utopia. We conjure up all kinds of ideas as to what we think a perfect society would be like. Hollywood is awash in films about perfect worlds where all men are equal and there is no suffering or wars. Karl Marx thought that if men would just abolish capitalism and share everything equally that in time the world would be a perfect Utopia. The word utopia comes from the Greek word “*ou topos*” which means “No Place” (*ou not, no + topos place*) as in there is no place on earth that can be found where a true rest can be experienced. As with the ill-fated Tower of Babel, men always fail to recognize God's role in their perfect society and so they inevitably argue and fight amongst them selves about what is better. The writer of this letter points out that the true rest is in Christ Jesus who has made it possible for us to join in a fellowship with God and enjoy a true rest from our worries of this world and freedom from eternal damnation.

*(Hebrews 4:16 NASB)*

*Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace,  
so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Another fighter has failed to answer the bell, with the towel being thrown in by Joshua himself.

In Exodus chapter 25, you'll find God giving Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle. Then in Exodus chapters 28-29, He interrupts his own instructions for those blueprints to direct Aaron's role and his priesthood, returning afterwards in chapter 30 with the tabernacle instructions. I wonder if God wanted His people to realize their worship included more than a beautiful tent surrounded by a linen curtain? I think He wanted them to experience a Temple that was more than just inanimate brass along with silver and gold furniture. It had to include creatures that could think and talk and reason it needed men who were priests by His designation. After all we were originally created to worship Him and it is Him we need to get back to communing with.

So God interrupted the instructions for the tabernacle to give His instructions for the Levitical priesthood because it was "a shadow of good things to come," His Son, Christ Jesus. These priests represented man to God in the tabernacle that was a replica of Gods temple in heaven. However these priests were still only mortal men who would die and have to be replaced. Being the High Priest Aaron was above all others, but in time he too would die for Adams sin.

The writer of Hebrews points out how Christ was like the priest of the "God Most High, Melchizedek". Like Melchizedek, Christ has no beginning and no end. He is eternal. Christ is better than Aaron in His Person because he is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." He is better than Aaron and his descendants in His ministry because He ministers in a better tabernacle in heaven, the one in heaven that Moses copied by Gods instructions. He's the Mediator of a better covenant, one that was established on better promises than the Law of Moses could ever offer. The priesthood of Christ is an everlasting priesthood. Christ offered a better sacrifice on a better altar, with a better hope of a better resurrection.

The sacrifice of animals for sins never eliminated the guilt of sin it just covered the sin and made the person acceptable to God. The sacrifice of Christ and the spilling of His blood eliminated our sin by paying for it once for all eternity. His work of redemption is done, it never needs repeating as the old system did. As our Priest, He lives forever to make

intercession for us at the throne of grace. He's our Advocate with the Father and He declares us innocent of Satan's accusations. God wanted His people to understand that, as important as the priesthood was, it only spoke of something better to come, Christ Jesus. One is left with the conclusion that a decision to abandon faith in Christ and to return to Judaism would be the worst mistake a person could make. This is exactly the conclusion the author of Hebrews hoped his readers would draw. To return to the old ways was to be lost in the wilderness and in the worst case scenario it would mean to lose your salvation altogether.

This, as it turned out, was a bloody round and in the end the temple and the priesthood was destroyed and the sacrificial ceremony was ended forever with all that the unbelieving Jews cherished, as God said it would. In a not so unexpected turn of events Christ defeated not only Aaron and the priesthood, but also the animal sacrifices and the temple all in one round. This was a knockout by a center cross shot to the very soul-erplex of the heart of Judaism. It ended up being more one sided than when George Foreman knocked out Joe Frazier for the championship in 25 seconds of the first round.

Next, we have the Law that the great Moses himself gave God's people or as I like to refer to it, the Levitical Law. I personally believe that the best defense of the New Covenant is its comparison to the Levitical Law. Sonny Curtis, who wrote songs for everyone from Buddy Holly to Lawrence Welk, wrote a song made popular by The Bobby Fuller Four called "I Fought the Law". In the chorus is a line that reads as follows *"I fought the law and the law won"*. Well, man has been fighting the law for a long time and the law always comes out on top. Laws are always made as a standard of what proper conduct should be, but it cannot by itself guarantee good behavior.

Take the modern day gun control laws as an example. We have hundreds of laws that restrict the possession and usage of handguns in America. Our local, state, and federal laws regulate the use of firearms. There are laws that regulate how old you can be to possess a gun, to the illegal discharge of guns in city limits. They even add tougher penalties for the use of firearms in the commission of crimes. However, the largest use of firearms is by underage gang members in inner cities using these guns in the commission of crimes. Like modern day gun laws, the Levitical Law is only as good as the heart of the people it is in place to control,

so too was the Levitical Law. Even though many men followed these Laws outwardly, and some even to an extreme, it was their hearts that God looked at.

*(Ecclesiastes 9:3 NASB)*

*This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.*

*(Jeremiah 18:12 NASB)*

*"But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'*

*(Matthew 9:4 NASB)*

And Jesus knowing their thoughts said,

*"Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?"*

*(Matthew 15:19 NASB)*

*"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.*

The Old Covenant or the Law of Moses was written on cold breakable stone tablets and it was not perfect, it had problems it was not faultless.

*(Hebrews 8:7 NASB)*

*For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.*

The Old Covenant, broken by the people, would be replaced by a new covenant. The foundation of this new covenant is Christ Jesus. It is revolutionary, involving not only Israel and Judah but also the Gentiles, it is faultless, and it's written in the gray matter of men's minds and their fleshly hearts.

*(Jeremiah 31:31-33 NASB)*

*(31) "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,*

*(32) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.*

*(33) "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel*



*after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

The Jews lived with their Law for 1400 years but they also failed to live up to it for 1400 years. What they failed to realize was that the Law was made to show man's inability to succeed without an emissary. God became man incarnate by taking on a sinful body with all its weaknesses and lived up to the Law. In time His perfect life made Him the perfect lamb for a perfect sacrifice. When He was resurrected, He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God thus fulfilling and completing the Law. When Christ took His place next to God the Old Covenant was obsolete and a New Covenant replaced it. One that is written on our hearts that allows us as Christians to be forever covered by His blood. Thus Christ is superior to the Law, so if we put our faith in Him we can defeat the Law. Another bloody knockout and this time it was the blood of Christ that did it, with a hard right cross.

This letter began by emphasizing that Judaism and Christianity are both religions revealed by God. The writer then went on to show how Jesus is superior to angels, the historical great leaders, and the priests. Then the author showed how Christianity surpasses Judaism because it has a better covenant, with a better sanctuary, and a more sufficient sacrifice for sins. Now that all the former heroes have been vanquished and proven to be inferior to Christ Jesus, we get to a point where the author exhorts the readers to hold fast to their new faith. With such examples as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others, the writer shows how those who lived by faith did so with no more than a conviction of assurances for better things to come.

*(Hebrews 11:1 NASB)*

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Put in another way "faith," or confidence in the divine promises, has been in all ages the means of perseverance in the true religion, and consequently of salvation. We must all realize that to live by faith is to live like a guest in a strange land with a belief that someday you will get to a better heavenly home. By faith many have given up their livelihoods, possessions and even their lives. Tertullian said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the harvest.

*“Go on,” says Tertullian tauntingly to the heathen governors, “rack, torture, grind us to powder: our numbers increase in proportion as ye mow us down. The blood of Christians is their harvest seed. Your very obstinacy is a teacher. For who is not incited by the contemplation of it to inquire what there is in the core of the matter? And who, after having joined us, does not long to suffer?”*

Without faith they would not have given their blood to grease the skids of the church. We all live by faith, whether that faith lies in a piece of metal flying down the freeway at 70 mph in the direction of other pieces of metal flying in our direction at the same speed, or in a plane we ride. The question is not if we have faith, but what or whom we have faith in. The writer was pleading with the readers to hold fast to their faith in a better promise, just as Moses who gave up a luxurious life as the heir to Pharaoh’s throne for a promise of better things from God.

Closing out this great letter the writer invites us to avoid the entanglements of this world and run a marathon race of endurance to the end. Sharing with the readers how in specific ways to they can continue the good race. Knowing that there is a great cloud of witnesses rooting us on bearing testimony that the race can be run successfully and that the rewards are great. Looking to the example of Christ who, after living a righteous life, suffered for our sins and now sits at the right hand of God. Accepting affliction as a child accepts punishment from a loving father so that we may be trained for righteousness.

We are told to avoid stumbling blocks that can become pitfalls and always listen for the voice of God lest we loose our inheritance. The readers, and ultimately all Christians, are told to practice brotherly love by having sympathy with those in bonds, to be sexually moral, content, hospital, benevolent, knowledgeable in church doctrine and Scriptures, and give praise to God. Finally we are called to greet and give respect and honor to our leaders, as they will be called to account for the way they shepherded us.